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A-11 SECRET KEPT WELL

Premature Disclosure Of Aircraft Was Prevented

By MARK S. WATSON
(Sun Military Correspondent)

Washington, March 2—A gratifying and surprising aspect of Saturday's Presidential announcement of the revolutionary A-11 is that so important a military secret could for so long remain hidden from public knowledge.

This is without recent precedent in American weaponry. To find a comparable example, one must go back to the case of the high-flying U-2 espionage plane, revealed only when Russian missiles brought one down. During World War II, secrecy was so loyally maintained inside and outside the military as to permit such scientific marvels as the proximity-fuse, radar and sonar to reach the battle area before their existence was even suspected.

Eagerness To Talk Knowingly

With the many items of weapons and equipment which have been developed since then, save only the U-2 in its complete form, one of the postwar bombers, and now the A-11 in its prototype-testing stage, all innovations of vital importance, have come into semi-public knowledge much sooner than they should.

Premature publicity about weapons has been deplored by the Pentagon and Congress, but not prevented. There are many reasons.

First of all, the American eagerness to talk knowingly, even if erratically, of something new and startling was admirably suppressed during World War II. But in peacetime, or cold-war-time, many individuals in high or low places have shown no such restraint.

Why President Johnson chose this time to make the announcement (the new plane is still in prototype form, which means that it still is a long way from ultimate production) he did not explain.

A surmise would be that with several of A-11's "10 or 11" prototypes already flying, and hence impossible to hide from professional observers, further concealment is impossible. It would be astonishing if the test-flights have eluded the watch of unidentified and unwanted technicians perment of the revolutionary A-11. President Johnson's cautious statement revealed—such as the plane's silhouette, engine-mounting, wing-behavior, rate of acceleration and climb, and speed at various altitudes.

All these phenomena are discernible from a great distance, and from them a fully trained technician can draw fairly precise conclusions. The late General H. H. Arnold used to say that "the day a plane takes the air, its secrets are known to any competent onlooker." That applies not only to curious Americans but to much more inquisitive foreign agents. And of all places likely to harbor secret agents the vicinity of a California air-testing zone must stand near the top.

Even though the A-11 secret has been kept so admirably up to now, when further complete concealment is arguably futile, the marvel still is that it was so.

Secret Kept By Many

The project got under way during President Eisenhower's Administration. It has been known not only to a considerable number of research people in the Air Force, the Lockheed laboratories, and several components makers, but in some degree to a great many skilled workers in the plants. At least one writer for an aviation publication almost certainly knew about it, and kept silent.

Tactical and strategic planners for the Air Force surely knew of it, and it is certain that they were obligated to share their knowledge with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and with some of the joint staff, and with a very few close-mouthed congressmen, who thought best not to have the matter discussed even in closed committee sessions.

The Joint Chiefs and the House Armed Services Committee pub-

licly urged only last month an additional \$40,000,000 for developing an "improved manned interceptor" (which Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara had said he did not want).

Whether this "difference" with McNamara was an elaborate "cover" to hide the nation's known progress in developing an A-11, whose Mach-3 speed suggests possible high value as an interceptor, is another of the continuing mysteries which both President Johnson and the Pentagon are keeping as mysteries.

Potential Cited

All that is mentionable on such points — the Pentagon continues as silent as the White House — is implicit in the President's indication that the phenomenal new plane has "potential" for varying uses. One obvious potential is as a reconnaissance plane flying at heights greater than the U-2 employed and at speed three times that of the U-2.

The President also spoke encouragingly of a potential, in some alternative design, as the high-speed commercial liner to which the United States is committed.

The manned interceptor is a third potential, which to most people is wholly conjectural in the absence of much more knowledge. Use in that field of aviation normally calls for high maneuverability, and combining that quality with Mach-3 speed offers its problems. It is certain that Air Force researchers are pushing very hard for their "improved manned interceptor" whatever its final design may be.

Openly stated is the existence of a plane which the new engine pushes at 2,000 miles an hour; and a body with new materials capable of withstanding the very high frictional heat developed at such speed.

Perfectly clear is this plane's potential for development in any or all of the three uses mentioned. Just as plain is the ability of the much-abused "military-industrial complex" to keep an important secret, when it is important enough.

NEW YORK TIMES

MAR 3 1964

Secrecy on Supersonic Jet Is Found Incomplete

By EVERT CLARK

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 2

—Existence of the 2,000-mile-an-hour experimental military plane was announced by the White House last week chiefly because the Administration knew the plane was no longer a secret, informed sources said today.

The question of whether the Government should reveal the plane's existence, since it was becoming known anyway, was discussed at a recent meeting of the National Security Council, these sources said.

The announcement also served to spur the Government's program to develop a supersonic airliner, which may face trouble when Congress is asked to approve a Government-industry cost-sharing plan.

In another action affecting the supersonic transport, the White House released without comment today a study by investment bankers Eugene R. Black and Stanley deJ. Osborne. The report urges that the program go ahead rapidly but recommends important changes in management, financing and timing.

Rumors that an advanced experimental plane was being built by the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, which built the U-2 high-altitude reconnaissance plane, have circulated in the

Industry Knew of New Plane for a Year—U.S. Report on Airliner Released

aviation industry for at least a year and a half.

At the National Security Council meeting, the fact that a magazine had much of the story of the new Lockheed A-11 but had not printed it was discussed, informed sources here said.

Although a number of publications have known parts of the story, the magazine in question is believed to have been Aviation Week & Space Technology, a leading industry publication.

Robert B. Hitz, the magazine's editor, said he had told the Government at least eight or nine months ago that his publication had known about the plane for many months.

He said the magazine believed there were legitimate reasons for observing secrecy about the A-11, but he asked Government officials to let him know if the security policy regarding the plane changed.

They agreed, but the only notification he received was a telephone call 10 minutes before the President's news conference on Saturday at which

the plane was announced, he said.

President Johnson said he was disclosing the existence of the plane "to permit the orderly exploitation of this advanced technology in our military and commercial programs."

Government sources conceded today that it was also done because flight tests of the plane "make it infeasible to continue the policy of complete secrecy."

The Black-Osborne report and analyses of it by almost a dozen Government agencies will be considered by the White House in deciding whether and how to proceed with the supersonic program.

The essence of the report was leaked to reporters last month. The full report was released partly because the White House believed that it could be considered in a "more orderly" fashion if the whole thing were available, Government sources said.

Lockheed is one of three airframe companies that have submitted preliminary designs and financing plans to the Federal Aviation Agency in the first round of a competition to pick a builder.

The Government has indicated that Lockheed will gain no great advantage in the supersonic race because of its work on the A-11, since A-11 data will be circulated to all of the competitors.